

METROPOLITAN MAYORS COALITION

a local initiative facilitated by METROPOLITAN AREA PLANNING COUNCIL

April 1, 2020

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AUSTIN FAISON

Town Manager of Winthrop

The Honorable Robert A. DeLeo
Speaker of the House
State House, Room 356
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Karen E. Spilka
President of the Senate
State House, Room 332
Boston, MA 02133

RE: Moratorium on Evictions & Foreclosures (HD.4935)

Dear Speaker DeLeo and President Spilka:

I am writing today on behalf of the Metropolitan Mayors Coalition to express our strong support of HD.4935, *An Act providing for a moratorium on evictions and foreclosures during the COVID19 Emergency*, filed by Representatives Mike Connolly and Kevin Honan.

The Metro Mayors Coalition (MMC), an organization of 15 cities and towns in the urban core of metropolitan Boston, is a voluntary forum where members exchange information and create solutions to common problems. We have been meeting regularly to coordinate on the issues associated with the COVID-19 crisis.

We applaud the Legislature for working to address our most pressing concerns and we **urge you to prioritize legislation that will address housing insecurity**. As individuals and families start to see their paychecks and incomes shrink, many households will have a hard time paying their rent or mortgage. This could result in significant increases in evictions and foreclosures. Families and individuals should not lose their homes because of a severe, but temporary, public health emergency.

The state was already facing a housing crisis before the Governor declared a state of emergency in response to COVID-19. Sale prices and rents in our communities are among the highest of any large metropolitan area in the country. Just over half of rental households (50.6%) are “housing cost burdened,” meaning they spend over 30% of their income on rent, and about a quarter report paying over 50%, which we define as “severely cost-burdened.”^{1,2}

¹ U.S. Census Bureau 2011-2015 American Community Survey

² Interactive Map: Nearly Half of All Renter Households Are Cost Burdened (2017), Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies

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HD.4935 would establish a moratorium on evictions and foreclosures until the Governor's Emergency Declaration in response to the COVID-19 pandemic is lifted. While chronic homelessness had been declining across the country before this pandemic, the number of families receiving Massachusetts Emergency Assistance more than doubled in the past nine years, a rate much higher than the national average.^{3,4} Families and individuals that are evicted are often left homeless, but now is not the time to add individuals and families to an already strained homeless shelter network. Many of us are working with our municipal and community partners to determine how we can better serve and protect our in-shelter and not-sheltered homeless populations. But it is clear that adding to the homeless and shelter population during this crisis is not the answer.

The Coalition recognizes that more needs to be done, whether it is in this bill or separate legislation, to also provide landlord protections. **We recommend that the Legislature consider legislation that would relieve the financial burden facing landlords, especially small landlords.** We know that a tenant's inability to pay rent also affects a landlord's ability to meet their financial commitments and we believe that it is important to take a holistic approach to grappling with these issues.

We also recommend that HD.4935 extend this moratorium by 60-90 days after the Governor's declaration is lifted. This would allow tenants and homeowners to potentially get back on their feet, once this settles down. This grace period would protect tenants from being evicted immediately after the declaration is lifted.

We respectfully ask that your respective chambers swiftly take up and pass this critical legislation, which would provide housing security to our residents.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please contact Lizzy Weyant, MAPC's Director of Government Affairs, at 617-933-0703 or eweyant@mapc.org.

Sincerely,

Joseph A. Curtatone
Mayor, City of Somerville
Chair, Metropolitan Mayors Coalition

Adam Chapdelaine
Town Manager of Arlington

Louis A. DePasquale
City Manager of Cambridge

Thomas Ambrosino
City Manager of Chelsea

Carlo DeMaria, Jr.
Mayor of Everett

³ State of the Nation's Housing (2017), Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies

⁴ The Growing Challenge of Family Homelessness (2017), Barr Foundation

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Brian Arrigo
Mayor of Revere

Austin Faison
Town Manager of Winthrop

cc: Representative Mike Connolly
 Representative Kevin Honan
 Senator Brendan Crighton